

THE CONVENTION DAY.

Sunday dawned beautiful and bright. It was a glorious September day and the whole of nature seemed to oin in the spirit of conviviality that dominated the occasion.

Every incoming train and traction brought more freethinkers to the gathering. It was evident that Ohio was going to do her share in the spreading of the gospel of human liberty. Now comes Otto Wettstein, the most widely known Freethinker in all America. W. M. Stowe, James Nixson, of Zoar, Ohio; Daniel Holstetter, of New Philadelphia, and others, whose names at this time I cannot recall nor have I time to get them in view of the hurry necessitated to get the written and in the mail that it may be published in the ensuing issue of the Blade. None the less they came from far and near. Some arrived early, others while the first session of the convention was in progress. When the adjournment was taken for the midday meal there were just 54 in the Opera House, all members of one or both of the societies meeting here in convention.

Called to Order.

Shortly after 9 o'clock Sunday morning President George O. Roberts, of the Buckeye Secular Union, let fall his gavel and called the sixth annual convention to order.

In a brief speech he outlined the objects of the Union and described its organization. He pictured its struggles during the six years of its existence to get a foothold in the State and expressed both pleasure and pride at the proportions to which it had grown. Delivering himself of a splendid eulogy to those present and the cause in which they were engaged, he thereupon introduced Brother Samuel Toomey, of Canal Dover, to deliver the address of welcome.

Address of Welcome.

Mr. Toomey was accorded an enthusiastic welcome. His address was pointed and eloquent. This description of his talk may not apply so much to the figures of speech he used but to the words employed and the sincerity of purpose in which they were given. Brother Toomey spoke from the heart and not merely from the lips. He meant every word he uttered. Among other things he said:

"Mr. President and Members of the Secular Union: It is with pride that I have watched this society grow and develop and it is with still greater pride that I now stand before this convention to welcome you to our city.

"For many years I stood in Canal Dover alone. At different times I have sought to give the people an insight concerning our system and our philosophy and have, at my own expense, brought Freethought lecturers to Canal Dover. Many years ago I induced B. F. Underwood to lecture. He gave us three lectures. Following him I secured John R. Charlesworth, then prominent on the Freethought platform. I also

brought Remsburg and Putnam to Canal Dover, and each time our audiences, at first few in number, began to grow larger and larger. I felt encouraged and finally others began to show an interest in the work and at last came the Buckeye Secular Union. Now you see what we have accomplished.

"I want to welcome you to Canal Dover and Tuscarawas County. You are now in the richest and most prosperous county in the Buckeye State, not considering those counties containing a large city. Our opportunities are numerous and varied and for this reason we have not suffered from the panic as other sections of the country have done. You will find our people generous and hospitable and as you enjoy association among them I feel that you will also enjoy the same results.

"Not being accustomed to public speaking, although I had to introduce the lecturers I have mentioned, because there was none else to do so, I have no more to say. Now I am appointed by some one else to extend to you this welcome to Canal Dover and that is considerable gain. I hope you will enjoy being with us and as far as I am able so to do I extend to you the freedom of the city."

This little speech put the convention in perfect good humor. It was the right sort to start the ball rolling. Otto Wettstein, the designer and maker of the Freethought badge and Ingersoll spoon, was on the program for the response. Unfortunately his train was late and he had not yet arrived. As a substitute President Roberts called upon John R. Charlesworth to make the response, who did so, as follows:

Blade's Editor Responds.

Search would be made in vain throughout the entire range of human vocabulary to find words sufficiently expressive to make due response to the beautiful welcome that has just been extended to this convention, and at the same time fully and adequately describe my feelings at the pleasure of being at a Freethought gathering once more.

Remember, however, that was not originally intended for me and I am simply playing the part of a substitute, imitating the late Grover Cleveland, as it were, and after I am finished you might wish you had been able to hear the original instead.

Speaking for myself, in person, and for the Buckeye Secular Union, as an organization, made up, as it is, of men and women from different parts of the State and adjoining States, I am proud of this auspicious occasion and grateful for the hospitable welcome offered to us. For the next three days we shall be the guests of your beautiful city, but I can assure you, and mind, I am speaking from actual knowledge and experience, I am satisfied that nothing will be said or done that would ever justify Brother Toomey, or the good people of Canal Dover, in whose name he welcomed us, to regret

the words spoken or to withdraw one jot or tittle of the welcome given.

Naturally enough some people may wonder what object we have in meeting here; what we purpose doing; and what will be the character of the meetings in which we shall indulge. My friends, in the first place let me say that we have come to bring you a new gospel. It is not a gospel of fiction but of fact. It is not a gospel offering a crucified bill of idemnty from sin and crime but a gospel that insists that each must pay the penalty of his own misdeeds, a penalty from which there is no justifiable escape. We sing no praises to gods for gifts they do not bestow and we offer no prayers to beings, or supposed beings, in the skies for imaginary wrongs. This gospel offers no bible, but in its place it lays before you the great book of nature, the book of actual and positive life upon which all the great minds of the past and present have left the imprint of their labors, the results of their thoughts. We ask you in the name of a common humanity, a common brotherhood, based on good-fellowship and love, to do more for man and less for god and to make a heaven for us all here instead of striving to build one up somewhere else in the hereafter. We believe and teach the precept taught by the late beloved Col. Ingersoll, greatest of all Americans, that the time to be happy is now and the place to be happy is here.

If humanity is sick or afflicted we offer doctors of medicine instead of doctors of divinity, and we have plenty of them with us today. We believe more in the potent power of pills than in the suspected power of prayer. We look to our doctors to purge mankind of all superstition, and which Dr. Bowles declares is both strubborn and persistent. It is upon this superstition that priests and preachers fatten and thrive. For this reason we are grateful to the Hoosier State for sending us Dr. Bowles in that before this convention shall close he will give the members and friends a prescription that is calculated to aid progress.

Nor is Ohio to be outdone in this regard, far from the Queen City there comes Dr. J. B. Wilson, brave, fearless and intrepid, a man equal to almost any emergency and ever ready to respond when duty calls. Before we depart herefrom we shall hear from him about a specie he has discovered, after some experimenting, for ridding humanity of the various degres of humbugs, for which we are to be congratulated.

And then there is staid old New England, of Cotton Mather fame. Do not be alarmed. We have no Cotton Mathers in this convention. On the other hand, Connecticut sends us the antithesis of that Puritanical fanatic and after Mrs. Bliven begins to get in her work upon the conventions you will appreciate that fact. It is a sign of progress, indeed, that Mrs. Bliven can reside in a